

SOMETHING IN THE WATER: ON THE MINNEAPOLIS MUSIC SCENE

by

Jonathan Kennedy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Art

in

English

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

May 2024



SOMETHING IN THE WATER

On the Minneapolis Music Scene

ABSTRACT

Minneapolis is a paradoxical place. Despite its rich and vibrant arts community, the city has some of the worst racial disparities in the country. It's also cold and it's isolated, and an unlikely location for one of the best music scenes in the United States. My claim is that the tension between the city's forward-seeming politics and its conservative reality helps to foster new and eclectic music scenes in Minneapolis year after year. I also argue that its music community remains one of the only threads keeping the city together, especially as it still recovers from the protests after George Floyd's murder. Studying the history and the impact of Minneapolis's music through its artists, songs, and venues reveals a traceable lineage from one music scene to the next. This reciprocity helps to explain Minneapolis's improbable place in the larger history of modern music. I will incorporate my own experiences, living as a musician in Minneapolis from 2002-2018, alongside the experiences and the songs of other Minneapolis musicians including Bob Dylan, Prince, The Replacements for an exploration that's both introspective and retrospective. This reveals how the indefinable "sound" of Minneapolis continues to evolve through its fluid movements and scenes, rather than any stagnant periods in its history.

[Kennedy, Jonathan](#)
Professional Paper

Contents

Cohesion: A Cold Night in December..... 1
Running, Jumping, Standing Still: A Scene Begins in Dinkytown 3
City Sound: My Golden Era 10
Love is the Law: A New Wave 14
Sign ‘O’ the Times: Prince and Other Outsiders..... 20
We Got the Movement: Modern Times in Minneapolis 27
New Day Rising: A Curtain Falls..... 34
Ballad of Paul and Shelia 41
Works Cited 43

Spotify Playlist



Nothing Gold Can Stay

by Robert Frost

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
 But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
 So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

"One does not love a place the less for having suffered in it."

-Jane Austen

Cohesion: A Cold Night in December

On December 8th, 1980, John Lennon was shot and killed in front of his New York City apartment, The Dakota. After hearing the news, a distraught Minneapolis musician named Curtis A walked into the venue 7th St. Entry and took over the stage, playing Lennon's songs for the remainder of the night. His impromptu tribute became a local tradition which the now 74-year-old Curtis A still performs annually. Every December 8th, the legendary Minneapolis music club First Avenue, and its smaller sister venue 7th St. Entry, host an eclectic night of local artists paying respect to the former Beatle through covers of his songs. Considering Lennon's legacy being tied to his advocacy for peace and love, his violent death left many grieving fans desperate for connection, and coming together through a shared love of his music became a fitting homage.

Years later, on a December 8th tribute night, it was thirty degrees below zero and newscasters were recommending that Minneapolis residents should stay inside because of the extreme cold. The downtown streets were vacant and the whole city seemed to follow the weather advice, except for a thousand diehard fans who were packed wall-to-wall in First Avenue, rocking out to Lennon through Curtis A's covers. Moments like these make evident Minneapolis's strength and resilience through its arts community and testify to its potential as a force for positive change in the world. John Lennon's widow, Yoko Ono, spoke with Curtis A about the annual tribute event, saying, "I don't know if you know the extent of what you're doing and how powerful it is... I mean, you're part of the healing process of the universe" (Walsh 277). Downplaying the importance of the arts often trickles down to the artists themselves, who forget their own potential as community builders. Curtis A could have been a

Bruce Springsteen-like rock icon, but he chose to stay in the city that made him and he still tries to make it a better place. Minneapolis's turbulent history, full of racial segregation and inequality, often feels as though it's a city on the brink of catastrophe, or perhaps *another* catastrophe since George Floyd's 2020 murder at the hands of a police officer. Yet, in response to the city's social justice failures, the arts community remains one of the few uniting forces within Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Public art spaces have a built-in potential for positive social change. By designating "place" as a participant in activism, the music venue First Avenue becomes the vehicle for healing every night, not just on December 8th. Beyond the safety of the venue though, the city of Minneapolis has a more tumultuous and complicated portrayal to the outside world. But there is no single narrative on life anywhere, especially in the Twin Cities. Minneapolis's checkered past, its rapidly changing present (still recovering from the 2020 protests), and an unpredictable future have made the city into a cautionary tale, albeit one often told by outsiders. However, those within the city, especially within the arts community, usually have a more positive take on their hometown but there is a disconnect between these two narratives. Both the naysaying outsiders and self-congratulatory insiders can fail to see the city for what it is: a paradoxical place full of potential but constantly shooting itself in the foot. This spurs an important question: is art reactive or is it proactive? Can a community come together to not only heal but to also say, "never again"?

In the wake of George Floyd's murder at the hands of police officer Derek Chauvin, the whole city joined together in protest, but nothing really changed. It was very much reactive. No song prevented George Floyd's death, nor could it bring him back to life. The city's response to

John Lennon's murder was perhaps both reactive and proactive but, still, very different.

Interactions like these, blurring the lines between participants and places, situates the Twin Cities music scene as a case study for the arts' ability (or inability) to enact social change. My own time as a musician living in Minneapolis, from 2002 to 2018, positions me in a unique stance for this study, one that's both subjective and objective. I have a love/hate relationship with the city, as so many people who have lived there do. But in my absence, I have been able to reflect on my time there. By examining its history, its music venues, its artists, and its songs, I've attempted to determine what makes the city's music scene so strong. A reciprocity between music scenes is, in my determination, largely the reason for its strength. For a place that's perpetually on the brink of becoming a creative utopia but simultaneously feels like it's edging towards dystopia, I'll explore how new scenes continue to defy the odds and flourish in Minneapolis year after year.

Running, Jumping, Standing Still: A Scene Begins in Dinkytown

When The Beatles first came to the United States a reporter asked John Lennon why he wanted to come to the county. He held up an album called *Blues, Rags, and Hollers* and said he hoped to find more music like it. That 1963 album by the Minneapolis folk-blues trio Koerner, Ray, and Glover has influenced a wide range of artists such as David Bowie, Bonnie Raitt, and Beck. "Spider" John Koerner, Dave "Snaker" Ray, and Tony "Little Sun" Glover formed the trio in the early 1960s amid a burgeoning folk scene in the Dinkytown neighborhood, home to the East Bank campus of the University of Minnesota. Tony Glover noted that the neighborhood "had a reputation of being more artistically inclined," and that, "it was kind of like a small Greenwich

Village” (Collins 59), with spots like the 10 O’ Clock Scholar and Coffee Break hosting open mics several nights a week. This ushered in one of the first golden eras for Minneapolis music and a new scene began.

But what is a scene? The word scene has an implied sociality to it, and it could almost be interchangeable with other words like community, culture, subculture, or social capital. But a scene functions in a way that these others do not; it suggests an outsider status from those within it. A sense of spectacle is inherent to the word scene, and, like any performance, it has an expiration date attached. Individual scenes can’t last forever, but their reciprocal nature tends to spawn new ones year after year. The social ties that form in one scene will often crossover to another, snowballing into dozens of overlooked, and often mismatched scenes. Hip hop, EDM, black metal, indie-rock, folk, neo-soul, and punk are just a few “scenes” within the Minneapolis music community and, whether they know it or not, they all benefit from one another. As the curtain closes on one scene, it always opens on another.

Robert D. Putnam highlights two distinct benefits that occur within an emerging scene, “bridging” and “bonding.” They both may happen concurrently, or one may and not the other. Putnam differentiates the two by noting that bonding is “good for getting by” while bridging is “good for getting ahead,” (Putnam 23). Bridging builds a reciprocity between scenes, an “I’ll scratch your back, if you scratch mine,” sort of service that benefits the wider community *and* a specific scene; it’s a public and a private good. Whereas bridging is very inclusive bonding is more exclusive, but they do happen together at times. For instance, the early 1960s Dinkytown, Minneapolis folk scene catered towards a certain subset of interests, both stylistically and

ideologically. It bonded its members together while simultaneously bridging forward towards new, unforeseeable scenes to come.

Among the musicians in the Dinkytown scene was a young man named Robert Zimmerman. He'd soon drop out of the University of Minnesota, move to New York, and change his name to Bob Dylan, leaving Minneapolis behind him. But an often-overlooked part of Dylan's musical upbringing is the influence that locals like Koerner, Ray, and Glover had on him as a musician and a songwriter. Like most art scenes, there's a traceable lineage from one artistic milestone to the next, and Dylan's first album, mostly of black blues and folk tunes, were songs that Koerner, Ray, and Glover not only performed but, in some instances, Dylan had learned them directly from the slightly older group.

Bob Dylan's version of "Fixin' to Die" from his 1962 self-titled debut album does predate Dave Ray's (of Koerner, Ray, and Glover) recorded version, but Ray had been performing the song live for a few years before his version was featured on the compilation *The Blues Project* in 1964. The original "Fixin' to Die Blues," was written by Bukka White while he was serving time in Parchman Farm prison in Mississippi. White recorded the song in May 1940, though it wasn't until it had been included on the 1959 compilation *Country Blues* that it gained a wider audience. Bukka White had fallen into obscurity and was working in a factory in Memphis when he was rediscovered, largely because of Dylan's cover of the song which he'd likely heard from the *Country Blues* album. These three versions of "Fixin' to Die," Bukka White's, Dave Ray's, and Bob Dylan's, show Putnam's bridging and bonding theories in action. The younger musicians bonded over White's tune while inadvertently bridging it towards a wider audience, positioning it for many more adaptations. "Fixin' to Die," became a staple of the Greenwich Village folk

scene in the early sixties with Dave Von Ronk, Buffy Sainte Marie, and later, Country Joe and the Fish all doing their own renditions, along with countless others. In this case, the exchange circled back to White finally getting his due as a songwriter. But there are notable musical differences in each adaptation, and there's also some interesting lyrical changes. Here's Dylan's and White's versions, side by side:

"Fixin' to Die Blues" by Bob Dylan

Feeling funny in my mind, Lord
I believe I'm fixing to die
Feeling funny in my mind, Lord
I believe I'm fixing to die

Well, I don't mind dying
But I hate to leave my children crying

Well, I look over yonder to that burying ground
Look over yonder to that burying ground
Sure seems lonesome, Lord
When the sun goes down

Feeling funny in my eyes, Lord
I believe I'm fixing to die, fixing to die
Feeling funny in my eyes, Lord
I believe I'm fixing to die

Well, I don't mind dying
But I hate to leave my children crying

Well, there's a black smoke rising, Lord
It's rising up above my head, up above my head
Well, there's a black smoke rising, Lord
It's rising up above my head
And tell Jesus, make up my dying bed

I'm walking kind of funny, Lord
I believe I'm fixing to die, fixing to die
Yes, I'm walking kind of funny, Lord

I believe I'm fixing to die, fixing to die, fixing to die

"Fixin' to Die" by Bukka White

I'm looking funny in my eyes,
I believe I'm fixin' to die
I'm looking funny in my eyes,
I believe I'm fixing to die

I know I was born to die
But I hate to leave my children cryin'

Just as sho we's livin' today
Sho we're born to die
Just as sho as we's livin' today
Sho we're born to die

I know I was born to die
But I hate to leave my children cryin'

Your mother treated me, children
Just like I was her baby, child (x2)

That's why I sighted, sighed so hard
And come back home to die

So many nights by the fireside
How my chillen's mother would cry (x2)
'Cause I told the mother
I had to say goodbye

Look over yon-der on that burying ground (x2)
Yon' stand 10,000 standin' still to let me down
Mother, take my chillen back

'Fore they let me down (x2)

Ain't no need a-them screamin' an cryin' on the
On the graveyard ground

Although lyrically it is almost identical to Bukka White's version, Dave Ray's is my favorite. I am biased though; my dad's favorite record was *The Blues Project* and Ray's "Fixin' to Die" is the first track on the compilation. Dave Ray's slide guitar stabs and his rough, baritone voice had an authenticity to the blues that most other white artists couldn't match. Dylan's adaptation is worth a listen too, though. On his, he bends his voice into tense shouts, oscillating between sounding distinctly "Dylan" and giving a guttural, aggravated delivery that was never used on his later records. He was 20 years-old and was doing the blues as best he could. And though the track is fantastic in its own youthful, angsty way, it's clear that Dylan's own "voice" was still forming itself underneath.

Unlike Dave Ray's version, Dylan's took several lyrical twists which other artists hadn't. Dylan adds several mentions of the "Lord," adds the line "And tell Jesus, make up my dying bed," and he switches White's "I know I was born to die," to "Well, I don't mind dying." The lyrics in Dylan's version spur it into a slightly more positive or spiritual realm, losing some of the fatalistic feel of White's original. But although both versions are grim, neither are devoid of soul. White and Dylan both sing the refrain, "But I hate to leave my children crying," making the song sympathetic rather than entirely nihilistic. White's version, though, is significantly less hopeful, and foreshadowed shifting trends in music to come. Groups like The Doors and The Velvet Underground soon began offering their own anthems of disaffection and discontentment, but their musical influences all trace directly back to black blues artists like Bukka White.

One line, "I can't stand to see them standing, crying on that burial ground," is only on Dave Ray's version. Its wordplay seems like something that Dylan would've latched onto, but it is surprisingly absent from his version. Dylan did, however, add his own verse about "Black

smoke rising...up above my head," which captures the feel of White's original while still being characteristically "Dylan." His version of "Fixin' to Die" documents his beginnings as a song interpreter turned songwriter. Dylan is someone who always wears his influences on his sleeve, even as he breaks new ground artistically. Just two years later, he would take the meter of Rimbaud's poem "The Drunken Boat" and morph it into "Mr. Tambourine Man." More recently, in 2020, Dylan incorporated themes from *Hamlet* into his 17-minute-long epic song "Murder Most Foul." He famously borrowed from other artist's work and reshaped them to become his own. It is a blues tradition, but it's also indicative of the creative exchange that happens within music scenes. Dave Ray likely showed Dylan the tune, who then exposed it to the masses, resulting in the resurgence of Bukka White's career.

When asked about the controversial nature of covering black artists as a white group, Tony Glover (of Koerner, Ray, and Glover) compared it to missionary work, citing that in the early 1960s artists like Bukka White, Son House, and Lightning Hopkins were mostly unknown. Glover acknowledged that while some questioned the "right" of white musicians to play black music, at the time of Koerner, Ray, and Glover's first album many of these black artists weren't actively playing, and the trio wasn't "taking jobs from anybody" (Collins 66). However, after the trio helped usher in a blues revival, many more of these older players were rediscovered and began getting gigs once again. Tony Glover recalled intentionally billing a then-forgotten Big Joe Williams as the headliner on the bill for the *Blues, Rags, and Hollers'* release show by simply saying, "That's the way it should be" (Collins 66). As far as who can or cannot play a certain style of music, Glover continues, "I don't see that anybody has a right to do it more than anybody else. It's what kind of chops you've got. If you can play it right, I don't give a damn what color

you are.” (Collins 67). Like Dylan taking notes from his peers, the trio took from what they heard on beat-up old 78s and let it influence their playing. Although Koerner, Ray, and Glover fizzled out after three albums, each member continued to have long careers in music despite remaining relatively unknown outside of the Twin Cities.

Koerner, Ray, and Glover did have stints living elsewhere, but they all chose Minneapolis for their long-term homes. Had they moved to New York City as a group in the early '60s their impact on the music world may have been very different. Bob Dylan's career surely could have mirrored theirs had he stayed in Minneapolis, but could theirs have mirrored his had they left? As much as Minnesota likes to hold onto their own, those who left and “made it,” like Dylan, are held in the highest regard. Although Bob Dylan fled Minnesota as soon as he could, Minneapolis, Hibbing, and Duluth all celebrate the songwriter's limited time there as if it were yesterday. Those who leave are rarely accused of “selling out,” and are instead looked upon with great respect. Or perhaps with envy. Although it may be somewhat virtuous to stay, it's often smarter to leave the cold and isolated city.

Several other Minnesota natives weren't appreciated by the state during their lifetimes but were given highest honors after their deaths. Even though Sinclair Lewis won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930, he was not welcomed back after he satirized his hometown Sauk Centre, MN in his novels *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. Today there is an annual parade called Main Street Days to celebrate the author. St. Paul native F. Scott Fitzgerald also panned his hometown, calling it a “museum of architectural failures” (Karlen 251), and he was expelled from St. Paul Academy for drinking. Today he has a theater named after him and even a bronze statue in the city, despite no evidence that the author ever returned in the decade before his

death in 1940. Playwright August Wilson lived in St. Paul for twelve years and wrote *Fences*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, and *Jitney* during that time, but instead of being embraced for the literary giant he was while in the city, his plays were staged at the perpetually struggling Black Penumbra Theater. Today there is a giant mural of Wilson outside of Minneapolis's well-renowned Guthrie Theater, although they didn't stage his plays until after his hit *Fences* had already won several Tony awards and been on Broadway.

It's telling that after The Beatles' one and only concert in the Twin Cities on August 21st, 1965, their management threatened to never return. Apparently, the Minneapolis police had been alerted that Paul McCartney was in his room with a female fan, and they "pounded on his door, threatened to arrest him, and made the girl leave, saying they were enforcing the midnight curfew," (Aamodt). Although it's funny, this anecdote is indicative of the city's forward-seeming rhetoric but conservative reality. The arts require a certain amount of freedom in order to thrive so, with Minneapolis' history of oppression and countless local musicians' careers becoming stagnant, it is not surprising that many artists do choose to leave.

City Sound: My Golden Era

In 2002, the year I finished high school, I was in a band called Morris. We'd been together since the ninth grade and were getting glimpses of what our lives might look like as musicians living in the Twin Cities, should we choose to stay. At that point, my ambitions were strictly locally based, and our band did wind up staying in Minneapolis after high school. Our early goals included opening for other local bands, like The Plastic Constellations and Signal to Trust; playing underground warehouse venues, like The Babylon and Mala's; and self-releasing

7" records and CDs. These were all accomplished before I turned 21, and by that point I was fully immersed in the scene. Had I not been surrounded by such a vibrant and inspiring community, I may have set my sights farther, but I'd found the creative lifestyle I had hoped for in my hometown.

Between 2002 and 2012, my own golden era in the Minneapolis music scene occurred. However, mine didn't receive the national recognition that past eras had. During the mid-2000s, experimental, art rock, and avant-garde acts would attract crowds of likeminded outsiders to underground venues several nights a week. If any of these bands broken through to the mainstream, a large part of the appeal would have been lost. It was exciting because it was *ours*. We created the music for each other and found places to share it wherever we could. Basements, art galleries, warehouses, and even outdoor generator shows were common at the time and, in the early days of the internet, most of the shows were kept to a word-of-mouth basis.

In 2008, I began living at a warehouse called Medusa that hosted bands a few nights a week. Touring bands would usually be the catalyst for our shows, but local bands would always be on the bills as well. Skoal Kodiak, Tender Meat, and Knife World were some Minneapolis standouts that became regulars there, although there were always new bands popping up all the time. At Medusa, the reciprocal nature of our underground community was palpable. We'd host bands from all around the world and connect with the other musicians. Their needs were basic: a place to play, a place to stay for the night, some gas money, a meal to eat, and maybe some beer. By the end of most nights, we'd have made new friends from different parts of the

country, or sometimes from overseas, and would be encouraged to come through their city on tours of our own.

Around this same time, I began DJing at the community radio station, KFAI, where I hosted a local music show called MN Sound. Lots of the other shows on the station, including Latino Alt Rock!, Womenfolk, International Jazz Conspiracy, and Rocketship Ska Trip to name a few, were named to reflect the genre of music they'd be playing, but my show took a different approach. While I chose the name MN Sound as an easily identifiable "local" show, I was also aware that its name was somewhat of a misnomer. Considering there is no singular Minnesota or Minneapolis "sound," MN Sound was an intentionally specific and vague name, and I hoped that it would add some intrigue as to what music would be played. It's only natural that an eclectic blend of music will emerge out of such a diverse city like Minneapolis, and I aimed to play it all. I knew that if I were to truly serve the entire community, I would have to showcase the wide variety of music within it.

Each week my mailbox would be full of homemade tapes and CDs, and I'd listen to each one of them. It was fun, but it was also a labor of love. I never knew what I would get and, although I didn't always love the tunes, I figured that if someone took the time to send their music to me then it deserved airplay, even if only once. At the top of my show, I would play *almost* all the submissions, which would set the stage for a real "anything goes" kind of show. I also featured local musicians for interviews and occasional in-studio performances, did weekly concert calendars, and curated a "From the Vault" segment in which I'd play vinyl records by Minnesota artists that were at least 20 years old after giving a brief history on them. I hosted MN Sound on KFAI for over nine years, until I left Minneapolis in 2018.

KFAI and Medusa were both in the West Bank neighborhood, and I wound up getting a job doing sound at a nearby bar called Palmer's. I can't say what specifically led to my job at Palmer's, it can only be characterized as a typical "one thing led to another" type of West Bank story. The Dinkytown folk and blues scene had moved across the Mississippi river to the West Bank in the late '60s, and the neighborhood still has remnants from era felt there, especially at Palmer's. Despite being the oldest bar in Minneapolis, it's also one of the most progressive. In an online review, Palmer's was described as, "the only bar in Minnesota where immigrants, punks, college kids, old hippies, homeless people, crack heads, and gangstas share the same space without it being a presidential ad campaign" (Walsh 80). Palmer's represents the melting pot that the U.S. was meant to be, but in practice the venue feels almost subversive and potentially dangerous. Perhaps this is part of the appeal, it's an antiauthoritarian haven for those on the social fringes. But these supposed "fringe" figures represent the diversity of the city. Writer Gerhard Richter noted, "Changes in society aren't on the fringes but are the center of society" (Richter 1333), and underneath the booze-soaked façade, Palmer's dancefloor holds some collective counterculture ideals that are threatening to the official city bureaucracy. It is telling that during the 2020 Uprising following the murder of George Floyd, Palmer's Bar was spared any damage while other bars and clubs were burned to the ground.

Back when I worked at Palmer's, "Spider" John Koerner (from Koerner, Ray and Glover) had a monthly gig there. But he'd also be at the bar just about every day, hanging out with all of us. John even kept his old 12-string guitar in the basement. I would see it sitting down there all the time, tempting me to take it out and play it. Only once did I dare to, though. I remember holding that guitar gave me chills, and I quickly put it back. "Spider" John's not only an idol of

mine, but he was an idol to several other of my idols as well. In addition to his influence on Bob Dylan and John Lennon, The Doors and The Kinks specifically cited his playing as being inspirational. That very same guitar that I played down in the basement that was the first 12-string Bob Dylan had ever played, and I could feel its history. Although I didn't appreciate a lot of what was happening around me at the time, I knew being at Palmer's was something special. But so was KFAI, Medusa, and the whole West Bank neighborhood. Only now, looking back, can I see how lucky I was to have been a part of it all.

Love is the Law: A New Wave

There are a lot of factors that allow vibrant music scenes to thrive, and the inspiration and creativity of those within it are surprisingly not the most important ones. Musician David Byrne writes, "A successful scene presents an alternative," and he suggests that alternative can come from a "sense of alienation from the prevailing scene" (Byrne 284). When a music scene is formed as a result of social disillusionment, an interesting cross-medium influence can occur. If the mainstream music feels irrelevant and listeners become disaffected and desperate for an artistic connection, they will often look to paintings, poems, literature, to anything that speaks to their frustration. A gathering of likeminded creatives in a hub in which to commiserate and share ideas for a new direction is possibly the most essential element to a successful music scene. Recalling his own beginnings, David Byrne notes, "If we wanted to hear music that spoke directly to us, it was clear that we'd have to make it ourselves. If no one else likes it, well, so be it," (Byrne 285). Like the New York scene that David Byrne came out of in the late '70s, an undercurrent of dissatisfaction was bubbling in the Twin Cities against the mainstream disco,

arena rock, and R&B ensembles that were completely out of touch with the youth alternative movements. Punk rock became the answer for many misanthropic people with artistic aspirations.

Amid this punk rock explosion in New York, the Minneapolis music scene was experiencing its own transformation. Aside from the still-strong West Bank folk and blues scene, cover bands were the only real game in town. At this time, musicians writing original material had nowhere to share their songs and connect with other songwriters. The start of the 1970s was like an intermission between scenes. It was a bleak, gold-plated era, but it was still an essential one. The next generation fed off its dullness and its lack of creativity and saw an example of what *not* to be. They pushed back and vented their collective frustrations through a new style of music. Punk rock was the antidote. It was the antithesis of the mainstream music they'd been subjected to; punk rock questioned societal norms, rather than bow to them. It was visceral, philosophical, political, and, above all, it was *theirs*.

Its beginnings in Minneapolis can all be traced back to 1974, when The New York Dolls performed at the Minnesota State Fair. Unbeknownst to the few fans present, the show was almost cancelled due to the band's crossdressing stage attire. Those who knew of The Dolls were blown away by the performance and many were inspired to form their own groups. The record store Oar Folkjokeopus, the venue Jay's Longhorn, and the record label Twin/Tone gave the new alternative scene its beginnings, and by 1977 it had begun gaining some traction. Dick Champ of the band NNB said, "From day one, there was a real sense of intentionality and nonconformity to what we tried to do. Playing music wasn't a career choice. Ha! Total joke! Anyway, all of us had discovered this amazing music. It was only natural that the enthusiasm

and energy would manifest itself into creating a band” (Collins 17). The Suicide Commandos, Curtis A, Hypsterz, The Suburbs, and Flamingo are some of the other groups that were part of this new movement in Minneapolis music.

All that was needed was a spark for the scene to really flourish. While cheap rent and few responsibilities were conducive to creativity, so were Minnesota’s long, cold winters. This, along with the state being in middle of the country, helped solidify Minneapolis as a hub for all styles, not just punk rock, and artists in the surrounding areas started migrating there as well. Another strength of this burgeoning scene was its fans’ openness to new styles. KEXP DJ Kevin Cole noted, “Minneapolis became a hotbed in part because it was isolated, and it was a cultural mecca for art and music-loving misfits from the surrounding suburbs, cities, and states. In a way it was provincial. We created a scene we loved, for ourselves. We didn’t do it for validation or recognition or to be like somewhere else” (Collins 344), and it was that very carefree authenticity that attracted so many artists to Minneapolis. Thus, a healthy competition had begun, fueling new bands like The Replacements and Hüsker Dü.

To pursue an artist’s lifestyle is romantic, if not partly delusional. When a scene like Minneapolis’s comes along at a serendipitous right-place/right-time moment, many artists can be drawn to it when they wouldn’t have otherwise. There’s no real economic practicality to this lifestyle, but there can be a calling. Paul Dickinson purports that, “There’s every reason in the world for you to give up. That’s why it doesn’t make sense. It’s not for logical people. It’s a lark, but you have to believe in your own delusions to make it work” (Collins 340). As the next generation of musicians were trying to find their own sound and their own voice at Duffy’s, 7th St., Goofy’s Upper Deck, or any other club, and to then be given support from their peers, it

didn't matter that their ambitions weren't conventional. Instead, it was the music that mattered, largely because it pushed back against mainstream artistic and social values. In a pre-internet age, discovering new music at record stores and meeting others in the same phase of discovery birthed countless new bands. The trio Hüsker Dü was formed at St. Paul's Cheapo Records, and The Replacements got signed to the local label Twin/Tone after dropping off a demo tape to Peter Jesperson at Oar Folkjokeopus. Their goals weren't fortune or fame, but rather to connect with each other.

By 1984 though, Paul Westerberg and his band The Replacements had achieved the status of Minneapolis rock royalty. Coming off their critically acclaimed third album, *Let It Be*, the band were at the top of their game. But despite the accolades, or perhaps in response to them, The Replacements follow up album, *Tim*, featured more themes of alienation and still showed a disappointment with the "real world." On the track "Bastards of Young," Westerberg perfectly encapsulated these attitudes years before they were to become cliché characteristics of Generation X. The song can also be interpreted as a blatant disregard for authority, especially towards Westerberg's artistic forefathers. After all, nothing is more punk rock than spitting in the face of your elders. But it seemed that Westerberg was also singing disparagingly towards his hometown, and towards himself. Westerberg, intentionally or not, made a distinctly Minneapolis anti-anthem about not feeling at home there—or maybe anywhere.

Bastards of Young by Paul Westerberg

God, what a mess, on the ladder of success
Where you take one step and miss the whole first rung
Dreams unfulfilled, graduate unskilled
It beats pickin' cotton and waitin' to be forgotten

Wait on the sons of no one, bastards of young
Wait on the sons of no one, bastards of young
The daughters and the sons
Clean your baby womb, trash that baby boom
Elvis in the ground, no way he'll be here tonight
Income tax deduction, what a hell of a function
It beats pickin' cotton or waitin' to be forgotten

Wait on the sons of no one, bastards of young
Wait on the sons of no one, bastards of young
Now the daughters and the sons

Unwillingness to claim us, ya got no warrant to name us

The ones love us best are the ones we'll lay to rest
And visit their graves on holidays at best
The ones love us least are the ones we'll die to please
If it's any consolation, I don't begin to understand them

Wait on the sons of no one, bastards of young
Wait on the sons of no one, bastards of young
Daughters and the sons
Young, of young, young, young, young
Take it, it's yours, take it, it's yours
Take it, it's yours

Paul Westerberg has said that “Bastards of Young” was partly inspired by his sister leaving Minneapolis for New York City to try and find acting roles. He elaborated, “To me, a part of that song is about my sister who felt the need ... to be something by going somewhere else. It is sort of The Replacements feeling the same way ... not knowing where we fit. It's our way of reaching a hand out and saying, 'We are right along with you. We are just as confused,'” (Mehr 54). Although the song stands as a Generation X period piece, it's truly timeless. The lyric, “Dreams unfulfilled, graduate unskilled / It beats picking cotton and waiting to be forgotten,” speaks to dissatisfied and jaded youth of any generation from 1984 to 2024, or whenever. The line “It beats picking cotton and waiting to be forgotten,” says, to me, that we may not have

much, but at least we're not like you; we're still young, we'll burn out rather than fade away. In that, Westerberg manages to find something worthwhile in the world, however cynical and fleeting it may be. "Bastards of Young" is a song for those seeking more out of life, but already knowing that this is all there is.

"Wait on the sons of no one," is a line Westerberg took from the Bible, but it's often misheard as "We are the sons of no one." Westerberg even admitted to forgetting his original lyrics until they were pointed out to him years later, creating even more of a Generation X-esque irony to this era-defining song. By positioning us all as "bastards" in the well-known (but inaccurate) hook, "We are the sons of no one," is a blatant disregard for the past. It's a rallying cry against authority, a middle finger to the old guard that came before, and, perhaps most importantly, it denies the artistic reciprocity which I argue for. But singing "Wait on the sons of no one" shifts its meaning to situate *us* as the torchbearers, and *us* the ones leaving behind the next generation. It gives an immediacy to this "slacker generation" anthem, as if there's no time to lose. But however it's sung, the past is gone and the future is still grim.

Two blink-and-you-miss-it lines, "Unwillingness to claim us / Ya got no warrant no name us," represent a me-against-the-world kind of attitude, but when Westerberg follows that with, "The ones love us least are the ones we'll die to please," more of a me-against-myself style of pathos appears. No one wants to "claim us," and we don't want to be claimed either... or maybe we do. The Replacements came out of an era when the Minneapolis music scene was in its own adolescence, and their disregard for its past was just part of the scene's evolution. "Bastards of Young" is like a teenager screaming "You're not my dad!" to his stepfather. Or maybe Westerberg, who was being hailed as the "next Dylan" at the time, was screaming something

similar at him. But while everyone was busy forging new identities, there's always an undeniable thread tracing back to the past. Understanding and accepting that is part growing up, and that's just what Minneapolis was doing. Even though it may have seemed like an insult or a regression to some, this soul-searching epoch only strengthened Minneapolis in the long run.

Now that period is seen as another golden era for Minneapolis music. From founding of the venue Jay's Longhorn in 1977 to *Tim's* release in 1985, the city had graduated to the big leagues. When Chris Osgood and Dave Ahl of The Suicide Commandos saw The New York Dolls play at the state fair in 1974, who would have thought that a decade later their hometown would become a worldwide established music scene? Their "delusional" belief in their artistry and their community became a self-fulfilling punk rock prophecy; and it helped solidify the city's place in music history, directly paving the way for Seattle's music scene in the mid-'80s and early '90s.

Sign 'O' the Times: Prince and Other Outsiders

Prince, arguably Minneapolis's most famous musical export, had both the nerve and the attitude of bands like The Replacements, but he also had a musical virtuosity that put him miles above his Twin Cities peers. Early in his career he said, "I will always live in Minneapolis. It is so cold, it keeps the bad people out," and he remained true to his word until his death in 2016, but it was a fraught relationship from the start. He had an eccentricity that clashed with the typical midwestern passive-aggressiveness very much engrained in the Twin Cities music scene. In his high school newspaper, in a piece on the rising star, Prince is quoted as saying, "I think it's very hard for a band to make it in this state" (Karlan 116), and although his specific meaning wasn't

clear (geographic isolation, racial biases, or whatever), much can be gleaned from that simple statement.

Minneapolis may be painted as a politically liberal haven, but the reality of Prince's hometown is one of segregation and discrimination. The brief period of the '80s in which Minneapolis became a hipster mecca coincided with the peak of Prince's fame, yet these two scenes rarely collided or intersected. His music would play on the radio everywhere *but* Minneapolis, where mostly white artists still ruled the airwaves. Was this a testament to the city's geographic isolation, its lack of diversity, or both? As of 2018, "Minneapolis still ranks as having the fewest people of color of any of the nation's largest fifteen cities" (Karlen 245). Although the statistics have changed greatly since a 1961 census determined Minnesota to be 99% white, Minneapolis is still "65% white and (only) 19% black" (Keiser). The state has the highest income disparities between whites and blacks in the country, as well as the highest racial disparity among high school diploma holders. Minneapolis ranks "39th of 50 states for the proportion of the black population with a college degree, 45th for black people in employment, and 48th for black homeownership" (Keiser). Blacks also account for "75% of vehicles searched by police... and 63% of use of force in police stops" (Keiser). Considering these statistics, the murders of George Floyd, Duante Wright and Philando Castile at the hands of Twin Cities police officers are no less infuriating but are sadly more predictable.

It is perplexing that in a state with such dismal outcomes on educational disparities, income inequality, staggering unemployment, and police brutality Prince called Minneapolis home. The cold and bleak city offered opportunities for some, but rarely for those who looked like him. Usually, once artists "make it," they leave Minnesota and never return. But those who

stay are positioned uniquely as “insiders,” able to see the reality of their home as a city fractured by years of orchestrated segregation. This dates back to turn-of-the-century discrimination against Jews and any non-Western European immigrants, limiting them to living in North Minneapolis, the very neighborhood where Prince grew up. Minneapolis was perhaps the only place where Prince could be accosted at the peak of his *Purple Rain* fame and at the very club he helped put on the map, First Avenue, by a white man saying, “You’re a black man, be one!” (Karlan 248). So why would a man who had the world at his fingertips choose to stay in a place that treated him so poorly? It’s an unanswerable question, and one that only adds to the enigma that was Prince.

Perhaps the racism and hypocrisy that surrounded Prince at home helped to inspire his music, somewhat akin to the frustrated feelings that birthed punk rock. Or maybe it kept him grounded, allowing him to experience what life *could’ve* been like for him had he not “made it,” even if just for a moment. Maybe in Minneapolis he felt he could hide out, make his art, and try to be himself, not the persona that he had crafted for the rest of the world. In his first TV interview he said, “I live in a small town, and I always will because I can walk around and be me. And that’s all I wanna be and it’s all I ever try to be.” But, in fact, he couldn’t walk around there. And even if Prince knew who he was, his fans never did. His elusiveness was part of his appeal though, and Prince knew that and played it up. After all, that first TV interview wasn’t granted until 1985 and, by that point, he’d already released six albums and was one of the world’s biggest stars. Also, that interview was conducted by his manager, Steve Fagnoli, so it’s likely that the whole thing was crafted in advance alongside the yearslong silence building up to it. Prince precisely planned any representation of himself to the outside world, but after years of

this performance he may have lost any separation between his actual self and the character he seemed to play for the public. I can only speculate that he found his true escape in music, and not anywhere in the physical realm. So perhaps Prince could have found that same peace anywhere that offered him a music studio and some privacy. Maybe it's just a coincidence that he wound up right outside his hometown, in an unlikely suburb called Chanhassen. He'd live and work there for nearly 30 years at Paisley Park Studios, but his presence was always felt hovering above Minneapolis. Random Prince sightings and appearances became part of the city's lore, but that whole time he was always like an outsider. Whether it was all part of his put-on persona or not, I'll never know.

Prince was a self-taught musician but he was also the product of his environment, a conglomeration of his influences and his surroundings. Not only was his father, "The Fabulous" Prince Rogers, a musician himself, but there were already several decades of surprisingly eclectic music history surrounding Prince by the time he was starting out. This dates back to the 1930s, when jazz bassist Oscar Pettiford lived on the very same street in North Minneapolis that Prince later did. Saxophonist Lester Young also lived in same neighborhood at this time. The Andrews Sisters had an unexpected hit in 1937 with "Bei Mir Bist Du Schön," a Yiddish song meaning "To Me You're Beautiful." Coming from Minneapolis, a place that was once labeled "the capital of anti-Semitism in America" (Karlen 256), it seems perplexing that a song sung in the language of Eastern European Jews, originated in a place so fraught with hate. Equally as head-scratching was The Trashmen's 1963 song, "Surfin' Bird." The Minneapolis group not only didn't know how to surf, but they apparently "had never seen the ocean before their song hit" (Karlen 257). Prince was a known fan of The Novas' 1964 ode to regional wrestler Reginald "The

Crusher” Lisowski, but perhaps more in tune to his universe was the 1980 Lipps Inc. song “Funkytown.” This often-misinterpreted song is about wanting to *leave* the stuffy sameness of Minneapolis and *not* about how funky or cool the town is.

These strange and wide-ranging hits surely seeped into Prince’s musical “education,” as he taught himself to play 27 different instruments. From Oscar Pettiford and Lester Young’s jazz remnants still reverberating on the Northside streets where Prince grew up, to a Yiddish song sung by Scandinavian sisters, then more Scandinavian kids trying their hand at surf rock with “Surfin’ Bird,” an oddball ode to a wrestler, and finally a nice Jewish boy singing about wanting to leave his *not*-Funkytown, Prince heard it all and spun it into his own unique blend of rock and funk and something distinctly Minneapolisian, however his hometown may have resented it.

Before Prince’s death, the general consensus in Minneapolis was that he was a bitter has-been; a washed-up, out-of-touch curmudgeon holed up in his Paisley Park mansion making music that no one cared about anymore. We’ll never know if he would have remained more relevant had he been based in some other city during his final years, but it is possible. Even at the peak of Prince’s fame in the 80s, when the whole rest of the world loved him, only Minneapolis wrote him off as a sell-out. But after his death in 2016, suddenly Prince was the city’s shining star. The day he died, April 21, 2016, the city mourned in a Prince-worthy fashion: buildings were lit up purple and the downtown streets shut down for an impromptu dance party. First Avenue stayed open all night as partygoers danced to the tunes they supposedly loved. Mourners covered Paisley Park’s perimeter fence with flowers and heartfelt tributes. It was a true coming-together moment for the too-polarized city, however disingenuous it may have seemed to some life-long Prince fans. But that outpouring of grief is indicative of the

people of Minnesota: full of hypocrisy, passive-aggressiveness, and great need to *not* say what they really mean. But in that mourning celebration, thousands of people were able to shed some of those mid-western qualities and finally just cut loose, even if just for a night.

Just as Prince used Minnesota as a place to hide out from the world, and perhaps even from himself, he was also very protective of his legacy. In a late-in-life interview, he ruminated on his shelved *Black Album* to biographer Neal Karlen, saying, “I suddenly realized that we can die at any moment, and we’d be judged by the last thing we left behind. I didn’t want that angry, bitter thing to be the last thing,” (Karlen 265). The last album that Prince did release in his lifetime, *Hit and Run Phase Two*, opens with an uplifting song called “Baltimore.” Although it straddles the line of clichéd protest songs, “Baltimore” now stands as a prophetic swan song to a career of great highs and tragic lows. It’s unlikely that it will stand beside John Lennon’s “Imagine” or Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind” as one of the great protest songs of our day. It probably won’t even rank among Prince fans’ top favorites. But the song feels like a perfect finale.

Baltimore by Prince

Nobody got in nobody's way
So I guess you could say it was a good day
At least a little better than the day in Baltimore
Does anybody hear us pray
For Michael Brown or Freddie Gray?
Peace is more than the absence of war
Absence of war

Are we gonna see another bloody day?
We're tired of the cryin' and people dyin'
Let's take all the guns away

Absence of war, you and me
Maybe we can finally say
Enough is enough, it's time for love
It's time to hear
It's time to hear the guitar play, guitar play
Baltimore, ever more

If there ain't no justice then there ain't no peace
If there ain't no justice then there ain't no peace
If there ain't no justice then there ain't no peace
If there ain't no justice then there ain't no peace

Initially released as a stand-alone single, “Baltimore” recalls Freddie Gray and Mike Brown’s deaths at the hands of police officers. Prince debuted the song live in May 2015 at the Rally 4 Peace concert in Baltimore, which he organized. Before beginning the song, he told the crowd, “The system is broken. It’s going to take the young people to fix it this time. We need new ideas, new life” (Charlton). His welcoming in a changing of the guard while also acknowledging his own generation’s inability to “fix” things seemed like a rare, truly genuine moment for the artist, as did the song. Some critics panned the tune, resenting its catchy sing-along feel in contrast to such dark subject matter. But Prince was never one to make a Rage Against the Machine-style rallying cry. And rarely did he get so overtly political. So when he did make his own protest anthem, his fans paid attention. The lyric, “Peace is more than the absence of war,” demands introspection, not destruction. Prince doesn’t spell out what peace is, he’s asking himself. And in that asking, another question appears: why is it so unobtainable? That uncertainty, in conjunction with his uplifting melody, resolves with one simple solution: “It’s time for love.” “Baltimore” doesn’t have the defiant attitude that’s grown to be expected with protest songs, but it doesn’t need it. While Prince maintained a more subtle sense of

urgency in the lyrics, the song's gospel feel offers some immediate comfort and hope. Their synthesis seems unlikely, but it works.

“Baltimore” closes with the chant “If there ain’t no justice, there ain’t no peace.” Those very same chants would ring out on the streets of Minneapolis in May 2020 after George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. A popular slogan appeared on banners during the protests reading: “Nobody thought the revolution would start in Minneapolis... except Prince,” and perhaps it’s true. Prince’s death leaves us all to wonder what he would have done in response to this tragedy. In a town that didn’t accept him, Prince gave back generously, indiscriminately, and perhaps at times spitefully. The mythology of Prince is embodied in the city which he came from, a city that no one really knows until you live it. It is a cold, bitter place full of cold people who smile to your face and then never welcome or accept you. It is a flyover city that became a cultural hub. It was a sacrificial lamb for a worldwide revolution. Minneapolis is a place that many love, despite having suffering in it.

We Got the Movement: Modern Times in Minneapolis

In the cyber-reality of the twenty first century, are place-based scenes still important? Although Prince did take notes from the Minneapolis scene, he also took new paths to move from it. While Prince was breaking away from his major label deal with Warner Bros. to form his own independent label NPG Records, a more modern cycle of artistic reciprocity was starting to become available online. This shift paved the way for many independent artists to experiment with new routes of getting content to their fans, and Prince was one of the first mainstream musicians to release his music through online platforms. But he was also one of the first to see

it backfire, and in 2014 he sued 22 of his fans for 22 million dollars, citing the pirating of his music and the posting of Prince content without his consent. Prince's pioneering methods demonstrated early on that yet another newly manufactured music platform had the potential for musicians to be exploited. While these technological shifts have liberated artists and fans alike to share and enjoy music together in a new kind of community, they also reflect a drowning music business and a shift from place-based scenes.

All artists today now find themselves in Prince's position, able to self-produce and self-release digital albums without a record company's support. But when the means of production is put into the hands of consumers unwilling to pay, these artists are then forced to give their music away for next to nothing on streaming services. Some musicians have embraced the devaluation physical media, citing complete creative control as a worthwhile tradeoff. When put to practice, this do-it-yourself ethos can indeed emancipate an artist from corporate overseers. According to writer Fredric Jameson, radical social changes like these rely on the "preexistence and the coincidence of three basic factors" (Jameson xiii): new technology, financial resources, and social groups. Although technological developments of the last twenty years have spurred the Minneapolis music scene into a new realm, one less dependent on place to build community, within that newfound mobility the paradigms of regulation, production, and organization have been broken down.

The music industry's shift from physical commodity to digital streaming is illustrative of society's evolution towards symbolic consumerism. The immaterial experience, or spectacle, that music had been at the turn of the twentieth century has now cycled back to similar terrain. Today, career musicians make most of their money from live performances, and not by selling

records or CDs which had been the norm only twenty years ago. Current Minneapolis hip-hop artist Atmosphere credits his continued success to the large amount of touring he does. This is a far cry from Prince's heyday, when he could record and self-release albums from his home at Paisley Park and never had to leave the studio unless he felt like it. Prince toured out of a desire to; today's musicians tour out of a need to. But still, concerts are place-based events. And they are just as popular as they have ever been. Writer Jacques Attali calls music the "quintessential mass activity" (Attali 14), and it is more than just a way to sustain musicians economically. A good concert is worth a thousand gold records, it is priceless. Live music may not be a tangible thing, but it is something that you can take with you forever. And today, it's a way to break through from the online world to the "real world" outside. Whatever way fans were led to a live show, be it online or word of mouth, bonding with others in the "real world" over a shared live experience is still how most new scenes are formed and sustained today.

All art bears the mark of its time. It's a way to understand the times. Jacques Attali posits, "Music is a play of mirrors in which every activity is reflected, defined, recorded, and distorted" (Attali 5), and within this "play" a poignant metaphor for *real* is shown. There is a growing fear that the next generation is less engaged with their communities than ever before, but these concerns are nothing new. To place blame on Generation Z and to romanticize Generation X is to willfully turn a blind eye towards the emergence of new scenes through new routes. In 2000, Robert D. Putnam wrote, "The younger generation isn't less engaged than their predecessors, but are engaged in new ways" (Putnam 26), and 24 years later another inevitable shift has occurred. Years from now, there will surely be different ways in which we connect with each other, and different ways in which new scenes are formed. But for the time being,

embracing and not condemning social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, or Twitch is a step towards understanding what a music scene might look like for a younger generation.

Back in April 2007, Minneapolis musician Tay Zonday uploaded his song “Chocolate Rain” to YouTube. It became one of the first “viral” videos on the platform and has gained over 137 million views as of 2024. The song features a hypnotic piano loop underneath Zonday’s baritone-register vocals, and it’s an unusual song considering how widespread it became. But the popularity of “Chocolate Rain” is due mostly in part to its video rather than the song itself. Zonday’s unexpected deep voice didn’t match his boyish appearance, and despite the song’s serious subject matter—a meditation on life in the U.S. for black Americans— it became an internet joke and one of the first “memes” of Web 2.0. But casting aside its countless parodies, “Chocolate Rain” is a still powerful and prophetic song, especially considering the city which it came from. What’s more notable than the song’s messaging, though, is the merger that “Chocolate Rain” represented: a connection through the disconnect of the internet’s growing collective consciousness.

“Chocolate Rain” was released at the dawn of a new era for independent artists, and Tay Zonday’s “viral” moment became a new goal for many up-and-coming musicians; but it also ushered in a cynicism and banality to the still-new platform. In an interview, Zonday argued against his lyrics being, “Verbally polemic, and to give verbal footnotes, as in ‘This should mean this, and this.’” (Kale), but he hadn’t anticipated that the internet would become a hivemind-like entity, typically telling users what to think rather than inviting in any independent thought. Despite 137 million people hearing the song’s lyrics, most of the YouTube comments focus only on Zonday’s looks. The song calls for radical social change, but it became a meanspirited joke.

Although Zondag was part of a new “placeless” scene via the internet, “Chocolate Rain” still represented the paradoxical place from which it came. Like Minneapolis does time after time, “Chocolate Rain” came so close a breakthrough; and had Zondag been more “place-based,” he may have inadvertently signaled to the world not to take Minneapolis seriously. But instead, its response signaled to the whole world not to take anything seriously. The song could have helped to utilize this new platform towards harnessing a worldwide movement, but it fell to victim to the prejudice it speaks out against.

Demands for social change are often made through whatever platform a person has available to them. But people never demand art. That’s not to say that art isn’t essential, or “in demand.” There is an implied connection between art and social change which transcends any direct demands for it, it’s just a natural occurrence. Where there is life there will be struggle, and where there is struggle there will be art. Art, especially music, is at the forefront of society, and often it’s a few paces ahead. Musicians are known to be especially in tune and in time with their surroundings. By constantly exploring new possibilities within the social codes they live in, they are positioned ahead of the status quo, and are therefore seen as potentially dangerous to it. But there’s a duality when straddling between the acceptance and the rejection of an audience. Jacques Attali notes, “If an outcast, he sees society in a political light. If accepted, he is its historian, the reflection of its deepest values” (Attali 12), and for an artist like Tay Zondag, someone accepted by the mainstream but then misconstrued and misappropriated by them, he is positioned in both corners.

The economic organization of the music industry correlates with the “acceptable” ways determined for artists to express themselves, so it’s fitting that Zondag again skirted the norm by opting for the Creative Commons copyright on “Chocolate Rain,” essentially giving it away for free. But this doesn’t necessarily mean that we, the consumer, are “dominated by a single ideology,” as Jacques Attali suggests. When his book *Noise* was published in 1985, he used the emergence of rock music, and its coinciding youth movement of the 1960s, to mark an end not a beginning of subversive music penetrating the mainstream. Attali asks, “Can we hear the crisis of society in the crisis of music?” (Attali 11) and the answer is a resounding *yes*. There are still instances where music is not corrupted by its commodification, when it slips through the cracks and shakes the very foundation of what is viewed as “acceptable,” or even what is viewed as “music” instead of “noise.”

Life is surrounded by noise. Dissonant, harmonious, clamorous, and melodious noises all make up our day to day lives. Noise signifies relations with each other. Jacques Attali suggests that everywhere “codes analyze, mark, restrain, train, repress, and channel the primitive sounds of language, of the body, of tools, of objects, of the relations to self and others. All music, any organization of sounds is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community” (Attali 6). A bird “call” is just that: a call out to other birds. It is both territorial and it is a beckoning. An electric guitar, a drum kit or even an amplified sheet of metal can have the same effect.

There’s a lot of “noise” music in Minneapolis, with acts like Gnawed, Monsters of Pot, and Overthruster just to name a few. This genre, usually without rhythm, melody, or any traditional instrumentation, reaches to the very edges of the social codes which define what

music can be. It can range anywhere from ear-piercingly loud to intimate and quiet. Noise music is often entirely atonal, and it's usually best experienced live. Wind sounds and breaking glass fed through effects pedals are more common instruments than a guitar or a drum kit, and performances are only typical in their ununiformed eccentricities. There may be intense barrage of harsh sounds with strobe lights, fluorescent lights, or no lights at all. Or there may be quiet groans from someone laying on the floor, cutting themselves. It's a spectacle, albeit one that most people wouldn't care to subject themselves to. Noise music is an extreme example, but it illustrates an important point. It is a genre caters to a select few, and offers a distinct "message," although usually lyrics are not present. When art like this becomes so subversive that it puts itself into an echo chamber of likeminded individuals, no one else will hear its message. And if they do, they wouldn't "get it," whatever "it" may be on any given day. It could be said that punk rock, folk, hip-hop and many other scenes isolate themselves similarly, although in less polarizing ways. But when musicians reject being bound to any political or commercial machine, and don't feel the need for any mainstream attention to attain legitimacy, when they make music for a select few that "gets" it, is music still the "quintessential social activity" that Attali purports?

Music reflects the ideologies of our time but also produces new ones. Take the banality of social media for instance. A profound disconnection from reality marks this anything-but-social platform and, although its soundtrack would be more bubblegum pop than amplified power tools, the platform's undercurrent is noise. Its fading façade of self-aware superficiality feels like it's on the verge of some radical change, like it's about to burst. Or maybe it already has but just can't be heard in isolation. Perhaps it's happening in warehouses, basements, bars,

and clubs, but no one feels the need to livestream it or post it to their social media feed. Maybe these new movements are kept more in the moment.

New Day Rising: A Curtain Falls

On Friday, August 11th, 2023, there was a punk show at a house venue in Minneapolis called Nudieland. Two men wandered in and apparently said some derogatory statements about gay people to some attendees who identify as queer. Then one of the two men shot a gun into the crowd, injuring six and killing one person before they both fled on foot. Six months later, neither of the assailants have been apprehended. In the wake of the tragedy, fundraisers on GoFundMe have raised over \$300,000 for the survivors of the shooting and for the family of the murder victim, 35-year-old August Golden. With mainstream media coverage putting a spotlight on this underground scene, national attention has been brought to Minneapolis yet again, however unwelcomed it may be this time.

The venue Nudieland is emblematic of the supportive and inclusive scene which it serves, a scene which August Golden was an integral part of. To many outsiders, the Minneapolis punk scene sounds almost utopian. It's a place where everyone's needs are met through their shared do-it-yourself ethos, turning DIY into a more do-it-together kind of ideology. August Golden, who had recently moved to Minneapolis from New Orleans, was remembered as being initially taken aback by his new community's overwhelming encouragement. A friend recalled Golden saying, "Everyone's so supportive of everyone's art. And everyone's like, 'Oh, you have a new band? We're coming to the show, and we're gonna dance and scream and take pictures and tell you how excited we are about your new band'"

(Grow). This same goodwill had reportedly not been felt by Golden while he lived in New Orleans or Portland, Oregon, although he was active in those city's music scenes as well.

Throwing basement shows, like those at Nudieland, reflects a selfless devotion to community. No one is making money off these events, people do it simply because it's what they love. They know that the connections made at these small gatherings can grow into something more permanent than just one night. It can help them build their chosen family. Robert D. Putnam suggests within small groups, "Outcast persons can claim and grow towards new identities, redefining themselves and society; can overcome solitariness through identification with a reference group and sometimes can work toward social ends or social change" (Putnam 151). Putnam's ideas directly correlate with Minneapolis's underground punk scene, a place where members can define themselves however they see fit. By skirting the expectations of the mainstream, Minneapolis punks find new routes towards personal fulfillment through a communal lifestyle which organized religion, school, or any other more conventional social groups may have failed to give them.

One of the hallmarks of the Minneapolis punk scene are the countless benefit shows. These will raise money for various causes, anything from personal medical expenses to charity organizations. Food Not Bombs and Southside Harm Reduction are just two organizations that have direct crossover "membership" to the Minneapolis punk scene, and both have had many benefit shows to help support their groups. Since the shooting at Nudieland last summer, several benefit shows have been thrown to benefit the survivors. It was a natural next step for a scene that is so proactive about helping one another, and other musicians outside of the punk community also organized benefit concerts. But as inspiring as those initial benefit shows were,

the shooting at Nudieland, which has been called a hate crime, has left an uncertain future for the punk community. When their zones of safety have become unsafe, what is next? August Golden's friend May remembers Golden as someone who was, "always pushing you forward," and, even without him, the scene surely will.

The Minneapolis music scene has always persevered, and in this time of uncertainty, it will find a way forward. What the next era of Minneapolis music will sound like, look like, or be like, no one knows. But there will always be a new scene to follow the last, and another "golden era." There's certainly one happening right now for some, and it's probably in places that I wouldn't think to look. My time there ended, but its dusk marked another's dawn. I'll always be proud to represent a small portion of the growing thread connecting one scene to the next, especially when I see its strength as it passes through some hard times.

The poem beginning this piece, Robert Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay," speaks to a sense of fleeting beauty around us. The poem can be read as an analogy for the loss of youth or the fragility of life, but when it's mentioned in S.E. Hinton's book *The Outsiders*, its meaning becomes more succinct. Hinton suggests Frost's poem as a call to embrace the wonder and the mystery in everything; not to mourn the fleeting beauty of a sunrise, but to be able to really live in its moment, to "stay golden." In *The Outsiders*, the teenage protagonist Ponyboy feels disconnected from his classmates, disillusioned with mainstream society, and struggles to find purpose in life. He reminds me of myself during my time in Minneapolis, unable to really embrace the supportive community around me. I felt alone, even when I'd be surrounded by friends at a show. I just couldn't recognize how lucky I was. I'd grown so accustomed to being around inspiring and creative people that I took it for granted. After leaving Minneapolis, I was

able to finally *see* the city for what it is: a resilient community, flawed but striving to be better year after year. It's an unlikely place for an outsider to find a community, but it's a place where an outsider *will* find a community if they just take a moment to see that it is already surrounding them.

In the fifteen years I lived as a musician in Minneapolis, I played in all kinds of different bands. After Morris broke up in 2005, I started a group called Ladyslipper. When that band dissolved, I started Ratt Poison. Then Mr. Hide. I also played with José Bové, Velvet Davenport, Fortified Five, The Richard Lloyd Trio, and Magic Castles just to name a few. At some point along the way, I had resigned myself to the role of being a sideman, so the last band I was playing with before I left, a group called Lamp Rays, was something of a return-to-form for me. I was once again singing and fronting a band. It felt good to be back behind the mic, although behind the scenes life was falling apart.

I can't remember exactly where or when I wrote "St. Paul Caves," but its source of inspiration will never leave me. Back in high school, some friends and I used to go hang out in St. Paul at the Wabasha Street Caves. Al Capone used to use to transport his bootlegged liquor down there, and a whole elaborate underground system stretched out for miles in a truly amazing labyrinth. There was even an underground night club there in the 1930s called the Castle Royal, and the place still had remnants of the bygone era in every crevice. It was off-limits and, although sometimes we'd bump into other trespassers, we'd mostly be left to ourselves. It was the perfect secret spot to drink and smoke pot, or at least it was until three teenagers died down there in 2004 from carbon monoxide poisoning. Someone apparently had a bonfire in a part of the cave but there was no ventilation. News reports covered the story, and our hidden

entrance was discovered and boarded up. I didn't really care though; I wasn't going back there again. I knew my time there was done, and that it could've been me that died.

St. Paul Caves by Jonathan Kennedy

When you're locked up for so long
And you can't seem to break out
Of the same grey shade
You've been held down for some time
Wish it, wish it away
And you lose your sense of time
What little light you had had
You gotta crawl through the St. Paul Caves

No stairway, denied
Gotta follow yellow twine
Gonna seize what's left
In a siege overseas

Try to walk in a straight line
Try to avoid another dilemma
At ease and surrender
You forget— you try to remember
You should be high, or you should be long gone
In a trench or waiting on a bench
In the breeze your memory's free
Forecasting forgotten light

Weighted
You know it's never enough
You know you're wasted.

“St. Paul Caves” doesn’t reflect on how I could have died down there though, and it’s not an ode to those that did die. I used being stuck in the caves as an analogy for feeling stuck in life. But I wasn’t exactly trapped where I was, I was more stuck inside of what I was—a victim of my own chosen “rock n’ roll” lifestyle. While my line, “What little light you had had, you gotta crawl through the St. Paul Caves,” does reference the dark, lighter-led journeys I’d make through those caves, it’s also an inner light that I’m suggesting. Things were getting darker all around me. I knew that the drugs I was taking could kill me, but I also didn’t really care. My whole identity was wrapped up in being a Minneapolis musician, and what I thought that entailed.

I wanted to be authentic and to live what I sang about. I bought into that romantic fatalism that rock n’ roll perpetuates. The “live fast, die young” mentality made sense to me, and many of my heroes seemed to go out in similar ways. The Replacement’s guitarist Bob Stinson died at 35, Hole’s bassist and Minneapolis native Kristen Pfaff at 27, and even the clean-living Prince overdosed on opioids. But drugs aren’t exclusive to Minneapolis’s music scene, far from it. Most music scenes have a similar track record. The pull of drugs can seem appealing, like they’re conducive to creativity, or they’re a way into some exclusive club, or they’re just a way to cope with the world. But now that I got out and am on the other side of addiction, I can see how delusional those ideas are. Somehow, I did realize that if I was ever going to find that “forgotten light,” I would have to leave Minneapolis. That’s not because the city necessarily fosters any dependency on drugs, it’s more because of what the city came to mean for me. Every street corner, every alleyway, and even every music venue became like those caves, and I knew that I could easily get stuck again. When I sang, “You should be high or you should be long gone,” I was singing to myself. I knew those were my only two options, and so I left.

What is often left out of the narrative surrounding the three cave deaths in 2004 is that one teenager did manage to escape the carbon monoxide-filled cave. Minnesota Public Radio reported that the survivor, “briefly lost consciousness and fumbled in darkness before he saw light peering from a hole and found his way out,” (MPR). I didn’t know that when I wrote “St. Paul Caves,” but it now connects my lyrics in an eerie way. Against the odds, we both found a way out. Two others died in the caves in 1992, as did three others between 1988 and 1992. I remember seeing signs warning against entry, but it didn’t stop us. It was dangerous and that was part of the appeal. In 2004, St. Paul Mayor Randy Kelly said, “You plug these holes up where kids dig in and they simply just dig around them and go in, anyway,” (MPR), and he was right, we’d always find a way in. But not everyone would always find a way out. For me, finding a way out meant leaving everything behind.

They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and that’s very true for how I feel about my hometown now, six years after leaving. When I left Minneapolis, I was sick of the city. I’d seen it all and I’d done it all, and nothing there got me excited any more. Now I realize how lucky I was. Minneapolis allowed me to live out my dreams as a musician. It also chewed me up and spit me back out several times throughout the years, but I wouldn’t have it any other way. Although I probably have more bad memories than good ones, as I sang in “St. Paul Caves,” my “memory’s free.” Living in Minneapolis for so long, I saw both the good and the bad of the city. Most of the “good” that I saw involved community, and the strongest communities that I witnessed were within the music scene. Most of the “bad” I saw stemmed from my own rejection of that community. Now I understand that Minneapolis is truly what you make of it. It can be a stagnant and dead-end city if that’s what you decide it is. Or it can be the land of

10,000 opportunities, but sometimes you might just have to create those opportunities for yourself. Minneapolis isn't New York or L.A., and it never tried to be. It can only be itself. I am grateful that there's not any singular sound, attitude, or vibe to Minneapolis. It's eclectic, it's diverse, and you do really have to live it to know it. Even then, it's still indefinable. But whenever I get homesick, I know that I can always hear my city in its music. I can hear my dad's generation in Koerner, Ray, and Glover. I can see the city's growth through bands like The Replacements and Hüsker Dü. And I can feel Minneapolis's perseverance through Prince. When I play Brute Heart, Mother of Fire, Dreamland Faces, False, or any number of my friends' bands, it's like I am back at Medusa all over again. Willie Murphy, Grant Hart, Charlie Parr, Lizzo, Dessa—there's so much music that can bring me back home.

Ballad of Paul and Shelia

Paul Wellstone wasn't a musician; he was a politician. But he embodied the spirit of a musician. Like a musician, Wellstone was ahead of his time, and he had a knack for upsetting the status quo. Like a music scene, his supporters felt like they were a part of something special. Wellstone had the charisma of a politician, but the politics of a punk rocker. As a senator, he fought "corporate America, the FCC, injustice, even his own government" (Walsh 173), and stood up for the little guy in everything he did. Writer Jim Walsh noted that Wellstone, "Didn't lead any bands, but he led as musical a life as they come. He lived to bring people together, to mend fences— which is what music does so effortlessly" (Walsh 175). So when Paul Wellstone, his wife Shelia, their daughter Marcia, and five others died in a plane crash on October 25th, 2002, it left a wound on the whole country, not just Minnesota. Local musicians including

Mason Jennings and Larry Long quickly wrote tribute songs, and everyone seemed to have a Paul Wellstone story. Although I was still a teenager, even I'd gotten to shake his hand once. After his death, it was a natural next-step for Jim Walsh and others to help organize the Paul and Shelia Wellstone World Music Day on the one-year anniversary of his death.

Like Curtis A's annual Lennon tribute on December 8th, October 25th was intended to not just mourn their deaths but to celebrate their lives as well. Thousands of Minnesotans and many outside the state celebrated however they saw fit. I vividly remember recording music in my bedroom that day, and still have a cassette with "Wellstone Music Day" scrawled on it. Others booked tribute gigs, played music in parks, spun records at home, or simply sung in the shower. As the first Wellstone World Music Day approached, Jim Walsh encouraged people to share their plans for it and their memories of Wellstone for the local weekly paper, *City Pages*. Like Prince's death, it was another real coming together moment for Minneapolis, and reading all the heartfelt tributes to the senator gave us a shot of hope in a time of need. But Wellstone's death reflects the paradoxical nature of the state which he served. Minnesota's "two steps forward, one step back" reality seemed to take a giant leap backwards after Wellstone died, and it may have never fully recovered. But in the two decades since his death, music continues to push the state towards more forward-thinking ideas. Whether that music is played on October 25th, December 8th, April 21st, or on any other day doesn't matter, just as long as it keeps playing. Minneapolis has been through a lot throughout the years, its streets aren't paved with gold, they never were. They are cracked and fractured from years of being weighed down. But that weight is needed, it gives something to push against. It gives us music.

Works Cited:

- Aamodt, Britt. "The Beatles' One and Only Concert in Minnesota." *MinnPost*, 30 Jan. 2023, www.minnpost.com/mnopedia/2023/01/the-beatles-one-and-only-concert-in-minnesota/.
- Attali, Jacques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.
- Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey & Persuasion by Jane Austen*. J.M. Dent, 1919, 1919.
- Byrne, David. *How Music Works*. McSweeney's, 2012.
- Collins, Cyn, and Garrison Keillor. *West Bank Boogie: Forty Years of Music, Mayhem and Memories*, Triangle Park Creative, Minneapolis, MN, 2006.
- Complicated Fun The Birth of Minneapolis Punk and Indie Rock, 1974-1984 --- An Oral History*. Interview by Cyn Collins, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2017.
- Charlton, Laretta. "Prince's 'Baltimore' Is a More Complex Kind of Protest Song." *Vulture*, Vulture, 11 May 2015, www.vulture.com/2015/05/baltimore-is-not-your-typical-protest-song.html.
- Dylan, Bob. "Fixin' to Die." *Bob Dylan*. Columbia Records. 1962
- Frost, Robert. "Nothing Gold Can Stay: A Poem." *The Yale Review*, vol. 13, 1924, pp. 30.
- Hinton, S.E. *The Outsiders: By S.E. Hinton*. Speak. 2003.
- Grow, Kory. "Friends Remember 'Punk as F-Ck' Musician Killed in Minneapolis Shooting." *Rolling Stone*, Rolling Stone, 17 Aug. 2023, www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/minneapolis-nudieland-shooting-august-golden-1234807228/.
- Kale, Sirin, "Tay Zonday Does Not Want You to Understand the Meaning of 'Chocolate Rain.'" *VICE*, 24 Aug. 2016, www.vice.com/en/article/d3ggvk/tay-zonday-does-not-want-you-to-understand-the-meaning-of-chocolate-rain.
- Karlen, Neal. *This Thing Called Life: Prince's Odyssey, on and off the Record*. St. Martin's Press, 2020.
- Keiser, Richard. "Being Black and Poor in Minneapolis." *Le Monde Diplomatique*. <https://mondediplo.com/2020/07/03minneapolis>. July 2020.
- Kennedy, Jonathan. "St. Paul Caves." *Lamp Rays*. Self-released. 2016.

Minnesota Public Radio. "MPR: Three Teens Die in Caves along Mississippi River." *News & Features*, 28 Apr. 2004, news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2004/04/28_ap_cavedeaths/.

Prince. "Baltimore" *Hit n Run Phase Two*. NPG Records. 2015.

Prince. "First Television Interview." MTV. 1985.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone : The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster, 2000.

Richter, David H. *The Critical Tradition : Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. St. Martin's Press, 1989.

Walsh, Jim. *Bar Yarns and Manic-Depressive Mixtapes Jim Walsh on Music from Minneapolis to the Outer Limits*. University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

Westerberg, Paul. "Bastards of Young." *Tim*. Sire Records. 1985.

White, Bukka. "Fixin' to Die Blues." Okeh Records. 1940.